

THE
COUNTRY SPECTATOR.

NUMBER XXIV.

TUESDAY, 19 March, 1793.

Qui se ostentat, aut eorum, quibuscum est, commodi rationem non habet, is ineptus dicitur. TULL.

He, who is ostentatious, or who pays no regard to the convenience of those, with whom he associates, is *impertinent*.

WHEN the *Spectator* had passed about a month at the seat of *Sir Roger de Coverley*, during which time, as my Readers may remember, he confined himself chiefly to rural topics, he began to discover that he had fixed upon a situation not the most convenient for the purpose of collecting remarks. "My greatest difficulty" says he "in the Country is to *find* sport, and in Town to *chuse* it." Had so discouraging an observation recurred to my remembrance, when I first formed the design of publishing these weekly Papers, it would immediately have caused me to relinquish my scheme. And, indeed, considering the inconstancy of my temper, I have wondered, how a plan, which took a fort-

night's deliberation, ever came to be executed: for a fortnight, tho' no very great space of time, might have thrown into my way fifty obstacles and objections, any one of which, to a man of my turn of mind, would have been sufficient to have rendered my project abortive.

MIXED society is, undoubtedly, the proper scene for a *Spectator*; and the difficulty of meeting with it in the Country must have given rise to the remark above quoted. It is possible to have a numerous acquaintance without possessing the means of observation. When we are constant witnesses of the same habits and peculiarities, they make little impression on the mind, but soon grow familiar and pass unobserved: it is among strangers, that we must acquire a knowledge of life and manners, because the particular customs and sentiments of persons unknown to us, strike us with the force of novelty, and are contemplated without partiality or prejudice.

IN order, however, to collect as many remarks as possible for the support of my speculations, I determined to pursue the same plan in the Country, which my illustrious forerunner did in *Town*, by mixing with the most miscellaneous companies I could find. Recollecting his imaginary club, I instantly became a member of a real one, consisting, partly, of the same sort of personages with those, in

whose company he pretends to have passed his evenings. It boasts several names of equal credit in the City with *Sir Andrew Freeport*; three *Clergymen* of great worth; a gentleman of the *Inner Temple*, of whom delicacy forbids me to speak particularly; a *Spectator*, whom I shall barely mention; and a variety of characters not to be met with in the fictitious club. As to a *Captain Sentry*, a *Sir Roger*, and a *Will Honeycomb*, tho' we have no gentlemen of their description on our list, I sometimes think I can discern them among the company, who occasionally honor us with a visit. From associating every *Friday Evening* with personages like these, it may be supposed, I have derived no inconsiderable advantage; and I take this opportunity of mentioning them with respect, whilst I am yet a member of their society, not, perhaps, without the vanity of hoping, that they will sometimes drink my health, when I am "Over the hills and far away."

THE place, however, in which I had expected to have been able to collect remarks in the greatest abundance, is the common room at any of the great inns frequented by *Travellers*. Amidst such a variety of men of so many different occupations, some of whom in the course of the year visit every town of note in the kingdom, one might naturally hope to find treasures of desultory knowledge, which require only to be brought to light, to rise to value

and importance. With this intent I have frequently popped my head into a room full of such company, pretty certain of collecting hints for my next week's lucubration; but from whatever cause it proceeds, I never have been able to boast of my success. I generally observe in them an invincible aversion to discourse on any subjects, which can be interesting, such as their adventures, the prosperity or decline of their species of traffic, the manners and customs of the places they have visited, and other topics of the like nature. I have only gathered from their discourse, that the weather was fair or foul, and that the last stage they had travelled, was a long or short one. This unwillingness of communication I have sometimes attributed to the fatigue arising from their journey: at other times I have imagined, that the vast quantities of tobacco, which they smoke, has for a while clouded their understandings: and, more than once, I have suspected, that they had received secret intelligence of my being a spy. But upon more mature deliberation, I am inclined to believe that all men, who have seen the world are shy before those, who have seen as much of it as themselves, however communicative they may be to the ignorant and untravelled. They, who relate adventures, usually do it with a view to excite surprise; and where nobody can be made to stare without the aid of embellishment, and every deviation from the truth is liable to be detected, it is no wonder if loquacity give way to silence, or facts alone

be asserted, which nobody can contradict or disbelieve.

Of the subjects, however, which occur to the observation of a *Country Spectator*, some are sacred and dangerous to meddle with. I have often begun a speculation, which delicacy has obliged me to suppress, and I have drawn characters, which have never seen the light, from their too great similitude to those of some of my Readers, who happening to recognise an accidental likeness, might imagine themselves singled out for satire or ridicule. To steer clear of this difficulty requires no common skill. He, who writes in the Country, and draws characters at all like the life, will certainly be thought a libeller and lampooner; yet he, who lashes follies, which exist only in the imagination, wherever he may chance to write, will certainly no where be read.

Thus circumscribed are the limits, which are fixed to my disquisitions. I have, therefore, found it necessary sometimes to admit papers, which have no immediate reference to rural life, but are equally adapted both to the Town and Country. These may be considered in the nature of the alloy, which artists mix with pure gold; for while they make the genuine metal hold out longer, they render the composition more durable: they take away something from the locality of my work; a property, above all others, hostile to the longevity of literature.

THE following letters have arrived very opportunely for filling up to-day's Paper.

TO THE COUNTRY SPECTATOR.

Sir,

I AM a young lady, one among many others in the town, in which I live, who are much pleased with your Essay of *March* 5th. To entertain honourable notions of our sex, is a very strong proof that a man has a good heart. I am happy to find in more places than one of your work, that you highly approve of our amusing ourselves with reading; but I rather wonder that while you were upon this subject, you never said a word about *Book-Societies*. I can only suppose, that you never heard of such things, or else that you disapprove of them; tho' to recommend reading and to discourage us from having books, is what I cannot comprehend.

HOWEVER, Sir, you are to know that in this town a Book-Society has been established for these last nineteen years. I have heard (for I do not remember so far back) that for some time there were no complaints among the subscribers, but all parties were satisfied. But about two years ago books were introduced into the Society, that the majority disapproved of; and, indeed, I wonder it had not always been the case, as every subscriber had a right in turn to bespeak whatever books he pleased: and some of them I am pretty sure are no great judges,

besides that our town is divided into almost as many parties as families. About a year ago there came to reside in the town *Mr. Rust*, the Curate, who had the reputation of great learning and judgment in books. He was requested by all the subscribers to take upon himself the trouble of ordering for the use of the Society, whatever books he thought proper. I was reading the other day in a political pamphlet, that "it is always dangerous to renounce rights, or to vest aggregated power in any single person." And so, indeed, I find it. *Mr. Rust* has exceedingly abused his authority by ordering such books, as half the Society, which is chiefly composed of women, cannot understand. I could not recollect the names of one quarter of them, but I have a list now before me; in which I find *Gilbert Wakefield's Silva Critica*, *Gregory's Philosophical Essays*, *Siglarium Romanum*, *Archæologia* and fifty others with hard names: and I verily believe, if you had made use constantly of *English* mottos, he would not have taken in the *Country Spectator*; tho' I am certain it is much more entertaining to the ladies, than any one of the books above-mentioned. Now, Sir, I only wish you either to print this letter, or to give your thoughts upon the subject in your own words.

I am

Y^r. attentive Reader

Mar. 13, 1793.

M. C.

TO THE COUNTRY SPECTATOR.

Sir,

THE Reverend Mr. Rust, Secretary to a Literary Association, having heard that some young ladies, members of the same, are dissatisfied with his proceedings, and mean to publish their complaint in the *Country Spectator*, he takes this occasion of informing them, that he is exceedingly disgusted with the levity of the female mind, which disdaining the investigation of Philosophical truth, is intent only on what is nugatory and absurd. Ever since he was appointed to his important trust, he has made it his study to admit such books only, as would be least likely to corrupt the hearts of female students. He has, therefore, opened to them the treasures of *Classical Literature, British Antiquities* and *Verbal Criticism*: and in order to qualify himself for his office, he not only has constantly consulted the ablest Critics at home, but he has regularly corresponded with the most learned Professors in the foreign Universities. Since, however, he is still deemed unfit to execute the trust reposed in him, he this day begs leave formally to resign it.

14 Mar. 1793.

S.